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ABSTRACT

An Analysis of 21 pieces of "Ladies Home Journal" fiction from the years 1900-1920 showed definite sex-linked language distinctions. Nine characteristics of speech were observed in sample dialogues from a piece of fiction which contained male-female major character interaction. One sample was selected from each year during the period. Female speech was distinguished from male speech by a greater quantity of messages, a greater number of words per message, and more unfinished sentences, exclamations, intensifiers, qualifiers, tag-question formations, and interruptions of others. These distinctions in speech did not change over the period of time studied, while the role and image of women in society underwent a transformation, a change which was reflected in the presentation of a different type of character in "Ladies Home Journal" fiction. (MKM)

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THE LANGUAGE OF WOMEN AS A REFLECTION OF THE IMAGE OF WOMEN IN A MASS-CIRCULATION MAGAZINE: AN ANALYSIS OF LADIES HOME JOURNAL FICTION, 1900-1920

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ABSTRACT

In an attempt to isolate distinctions between male and female speech, nine characteristics of speech were observed in sample dialogues of Ladies Home Journal fiction.

Female speech was distinguished from male speech by a greater quantity of messages, a greater number of words per message, and more unfinished sentences, declarative sentences, exclamations, intensifiers, qualifiers, tag-question formations, and interruptions of others.

An attempt was made to determine the relationship between language and image. Women's role and image in society underwent a transformation between 1900 and 1920; this change was reflected in the presentation of a different type of character in Ladies Home Journal fiction. A change in speech patterns, however, did not accompany this behavioral and image change, indicating that speech may be less prone to change than behavior is.

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Review of the literature and statement of the problem

Little conclusive research exists concerning male/female speech. We merely have an intuitive feeling that language distinctions based on sex exist. In fact, the theory of sex-linked language distinctions has been, more or less, an invisible premise in ordinary parlance. This intuition or assumption is shown by casual, sarcastic remarks that women talk too much; by the societal double standard of tolerating, accepting, and perhaps even encouraging the use of obscenities by males while condemning their use by females; and by the women's liberation movement's exposure of linguistic chauvinism by the use of "he" as the common gender pronoun.

These intuitions have been given some serious and credible coverage by scholarly writers. Otto Jesperson (1922) was one of the first writers to propose theories of sex distinctions in the English language. Jesperson saw women as the users of euphemisms, bizarre words, and adverbs of intensity, and possessors of less extensive vocabularies that revolve around the concrete. He also claimed that women frequently leave sentences unfinished.

Robin Lakoff (1973) and Peter Farb (1973) suggested that politeness and correctness are characteristics of female speech. An explanation for this may be that women are more likely to use forms considered correct because their social position makes it necessary for them to secure their social status linguistically. Stuart Flexner (1960) stated that slang is absent from women's speech. Lakoff and Cheris Kramer (1974) both discussed the use of the tag-

question formation by women as a way of avoiding full commitment and seeking corroboration for their views. Kramer also theorized that qualifiers are used more by women as a way of avoiding the direct statement of opinion, and this fear of declarative sentences is a way of showing subordination to men.

Kramer (1974a) noted a difference in the function of exclamatory words by men and women, male exclamations showing anger or exasperation and female exclamations conveying enthusiasm.

The implications of language distinctions based on sex have overwhelming importance in our society that is so concerned, of late, with all areas of disparity between the sexes. Social change and linguistic change should work together. Social changes should lead to changes in language, language being a reflection of social behavior.

An analysis of a time period in which the image and role of women in society underwent an obvious or dramatic transformation, in hopes of discovering an accompanying linguistic change, would determine the relationship of language to image.

Women experienced a great social change in the period 1900 to 1920, which has often been labeled the height of the feminist movement. Granted, the feminist movement of today might be making greater strides, but this twenty-year time span in the beginning of the twentieth century shows a marked beginning and end of feminist activity which resulted in great changes for the American woman. It was during this period that women increasingly participated in the public and political arena through the suffrage movement, increasingly participated in service organizations through the avenues of women's clubs and settlement houses, and increasingly participated

in the educational and economic communities. Accompanying these changes were more subtle attitudinal and value changes affecting the American woman. Her homemaking role was deemphasized and activities were provided for her outside of the home. The virtues of piety, purity, domesticity and submissiveness, which had comprised the American woman's image before 1900, gave way to an image of women as intelligent, politically and economically responsible, socially active, self-aware, independent, and even by 1920, somewhat disillusioned and rebellious concerning marriage. It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that the prim and proper Victorian lady of the nineteenth century gave way to the working, voting, pleasure-seeking woman of the 1920's.

The question concerning language distinctions now arises. Did this verifiable social change and image change for the American woman lead to changing linguistic patterns? If the correlation is high, might we not in the future use evidence of changing linguistic patterns as a barometer of changing social status of social groups in America? If there is no evidence of changing linguistic patterns accompanying social change, might this not suggest that speech is less prone to change than behavior is? If social progress for women does not lead to linguistic progress, perhaps this is why women continue to be stereotyped despite changing roles and images.

To obtain language samples of women and men in 1900-1920, this author decided to turn to fiction in the Ladies Home Journal. First of all, magazine fiction can be an excellent means of understanding the culture of a society. "Fictional work can be treated as primary sources for the interpretation of the imagery of self and society and as a means of understanding social norms and values of times

past." (Lowenthal, 1961). Secondly, the Ladies Home Journal was chosen because it was the largest circulating periodical of the era, and because of its cheap price, it appealed to the average, middle-class family in America, "The Ladies Home Journal was the first magazine written for and about the average, middle-class American woman and affordable by her. The part that the magazine played in the emergence of woman was undoubtedly important." (Mott, 1957). Therefore, it was theorized that the Ladies Home Journal fiction mirrored the prevalent societal attitudes and the language of the fictional characters did, for the most part, reflect the speech of the average person of the day.

Methodology

For the purpose of this study, nine characteristics of speech were observed in the Journal fiction between 1900 and 1920.

1) Quantity of utterances - an utterance was defined as one speaker's single message uninterrupted by lapse of time in the story or by another speaker's message.

2) Length of utterance - the total number of words for each speaker was determined. In addition, the mean length of utterance was computed by dividing the total number of words of a speaker by the total number of utterances of that speaker.

3) Declarative vs. interrogative sentences - every sentence was classified as either declarative or interrogative. Interrogative sentences were only those that asked questions. Declarative, exclamatory, and imperative sentences were all counted as declarative sentences.

4) Unfinished sentences - only unfinished sentences which were not due to interruption were counted. Sentence revisions were not counted.

5. Exclamations - exclamatory words, phrases, and interjections were counted. Exclamatory sentences were not counted.

6. Intensifiers - an intensifier was defined as an adjective or adverb which caused a stronger statement. Examples of intensifiers include: surely, perfectly, really, quite, awfully, certainly, too, such, extremely, so.

7) Qualifiers - a qualifier was defined as an adjective or an adverb that reduced intensity, causing a less strong or less positive statement. Examples of qualifiers include: sort of, generally, merely, kind of, somewhat.

8) Tag-question formations - a tag question was defined as a combination declarative and interrogative sentence.

9) Interruptions - an interruption was defined as any word, phrase, or sentence which interfered with the message of the speaker.

The following are the theories or hypotheses that have been examined by this study:

1) Females speak more often than males speak.

2) Females speak for a longer period of time than males do.

3) Females use fewer declarative sentences and more interrogative sentences than males use.

4) Females leave more sentences unfinished than males do.

5) Females use more exclamations than males use.

6) Females use more intensifiers than males use.

7) Females use more qualifiers than males use.

8) Females use more tag-question formations than males use.

9) Females interrupt others less often than males do.

This study examined one issue of the Ladies Home Journal for each consecutive year between the years of 1900 and 1920 inclusively. The only condition for selectivity of issues was an attempt to space choices at least six months apart. One piece of fiction was chosen within each issue. The conditions for selectivity of fiction included:

a) Only non-serial fiction

b) Stories containing one male and one female character engaging in dialogue and being present throughout the story

c) No foreign stories or stories including characters with dialects

d) No speech of children

e) Distribution of male and female authors

Results

An analysis of 21 pieces of Ladies Home Journal fiction from the years 1900-1920 shows definite sex-linked language distinctions. The theory that women talk more than men is supported by the data from the Journal. The number of utterances for each fictional female and male character were totaled and results show that the mean number of utterances for females was 33.6 as opposed to the mean number of utterances for males being 31.9. In 11 of 21 samples, the number of utterances for the female speaker exceeded the number of utterances of the male speaker. Only 4 selections included a greater number of male utterances.

Table 1

NUMBER OF UTTERANCES

	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910
F	12	13	27	5	29	40	40	21	38	30	35
M	15	12	27	5	30	38	43	17	36	26	33

	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	Total
F	53	12	32	19	78	89	34	43	20	37	707
M	45	12	33	19	70	89	33	39	13	37	671

Besides speaking more often, the females in the Journal fiction also spoke at greater length. In 15 of the 21 selections, the total number of words for the female speaker exceeded the total number of words of the male speaker. As a better basis for comparison of length of message, however, the mean length of message was computed. The average of the means for females was 35.0 while the mean length

of message for males was 22.5 words. In 15 of the 21 samples, the mean length of message for the female speaker was greater than the mean length of message for the male speaker.

Table 2

MEAN LENGTH OF UTTERANCE

	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910
F	24.3	42.0	38.5	74.6	37.7	12.0	12.3	13.8	44.4	19.5	20.0
M	21.4	34.6	22.1	64.6	20.3	15.4	19.2	16.1	26.6	17.3	15.2

	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	Mean
F	25.5	109	28.2	21.1	25.0	10.7	16.2	17.5	42.0	12.2	35.0
M	15.4	35.6	34.1	17.5	10.3	9.0	23.0	15.6	27.3	13.3	22.5

Analysis of quantity of messages, total number of words spoken, and mean length of message clearly indicates that the females in Ladies Home Journal fiction spoke more often and at greater length than males did.

Analysis of the number of declarative and interrogative sentences used by each sex results in disconfirmation of the theory that females use more interrogative sentences. In fact, females used more declarative and fewer interrogative sentences than the males used, as Table 3 indicates.

Table 3

PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL SENTENCES
THAT ARE DECLARATIVE

	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910
F	86%	72%	88%	90%	83%	88%	87%	88%	92%	74%	92%
M	80%	79%	63%	92%	84%	80%	76%	80%	79%	81%	74%

	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	Mean
F	76%	91%	92%	85%	71%	81%	79%	82%	85%	86%	85%
M	87%	97%	69%	74%	75%	62%	84%	64%	90%	80%	78%

The hypothesis that females have more of a tendency to leave sentences unfinished was confirmed. The total number of unfinished sentences in female speech was 19 as compared to 4 unfinished sentences in male speech.

Exclamatory words and phrases were distinctively characteristic of female speech and rarely found in male speech in the Journal fiction. The number of exclamations used by women totaled 114. Forty-six exclamations were used by males in the language samples. Upon examining the nature of the exclamations, it is clear that male exclamations such as "Oh, Christmas", "Good Heavens", "Great Scott", "Lord", and "By Jove", indicate anger or surprise. They seem to serve the function of substitutes for obscenities which the Journal of the early 1900's did not print. Female exclamations more often conveyed feelings of endearment. Feelings of anger, exasperation or frustration often resulted in the exclamations "Oh" or "Well".

Table 4

NUMBER OF EXCLAMATIONS

	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910
F	1	9	3	5	10	3	5	3	12	5	4
M	1	2	1	0	1	2	1	2	1	1	3

	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	Total
F	7	3	4	10	13	6	4	2	2	3	114
M	1	2	4	2	7	7	3	2	0	3	46

Another distinction between male and female speech was the prevalence of intensifiers in the female language samples. The theory that women use more intensifying adjectives and adverbs received support from this study. The total number of intensifiers used by females was 207. One-hundred and one intensifiers appeared in the speech of the males.

Table 5

NUMBER OF INTENSIFIERS

	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910
F	5	10	22	0	19	9	2	2	26	6	20
M	2	7	13	1	7	4	5	0	9	3	6

	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	Total
F	5	5	18	5	27	6	4	8	6	2	207
M	6	3	12	0	3	5	6	4	2	3	101

The use of qualifying adjectives and adverbs was limited in the speech of both sexes. Ten qualifiers were found in the language of the women and one qualifier was found in the language of the men. Tag-question formations were slightly more prevalent in female speech (female 15, male 11), lending some support to the previously stated hypothesis. Contrary to expectation, female interruptions of males numbered 24, while male interruptions of females numbered 21.

Discussion

It is clear that language distinctions based on the sex of the speaker do exist in fictional dialogue of the Ladies Home Journal, 1900-1920. The language portrays woman as, most obviously, a talkative creature. She speaks more often and at greater length than the male. Secondly, she could be seen as emotional and prone to exaggeration by her frequent use of exclamations and intensifiers. Her use of qualifiers, tag-questions and unfinished sentences possibly causes her to be seen as non-assertive, uncertain and submissive. Whether these distinctions are characteristic of female speech today is something which has not been clearly delineated. Nor is this question germaine to this study. Instead we need to ask whether these language distinctions vary over the time span analyzed. There seems to be such a thing as "female speech" within the pages of Ladies Home Journal fiction of 1900-1920. But is the female speech of 1900 different from the female speech of 1920?

As has been shown, the actual image and role of the woman of 1900 was different from the image and role of woman in 1920. This image change is also reflected in the fiction samples. The fictional female characters in the first half of the period are portrayed as married

women who are inwardly questioning their lives and marriages. Seven of the 11 females appearing in the sampled fiction between 1900 and 1910 are married. In almost every story, the female is restless or disillusioned with her life or she is expressing the desire to assert what she considers to be women's rights. In most cases, however, these doubts and questions are suppressed and she learns a lesson or compromises her viewpoint. For example, in the 1902 selection, the wife argues with her husband concerning the hat she should wear, and she concedes questioning whether "her own way was worth the price of hurting a husband like hers." As a prime illustration of the Journal's image of women in this early period, the female character in the 1905 selection is heard in the beginning of the story saying:

> I suppose that every young married woman has known periods of impatience. I suppose the very placidity and happiness of my life had produced a certain restlessness. I experienced moments which I think should be described as mildly rebellious. I began to wonder how it would seem to be a girl again-- and to be treated like one once more.

By the end of the story she is saying, "I was glad when I was at home. I have learned my lesson. I am quite content..."

In contrast, 8 of the ten female characters appearing in the sampled fiction between 1911 and 1920 are single. The female is no longer pictured solely within the confines of the home, but she is seen boating (1911), as a self-sufficient business girl in the city (1912), playing golf (1914), as an art student in New York City (1915), as a party-goer (1917) and as a mountain climber (1920). The stronger-willed woman of this later period is now heard saying such things as the following, from the 1913 issue: "I'm just tired of the whole game. I'm 25 years old and I'd like to be treated as if I were

25, not as if I were a piece of your furniture..."

The female character in the 1914 fictional selection is quite forceful and outspoken.

> Now why, please, should I marry you and settle down to be a stupid old professor's wife...I'm just crazy to go somewhere and do things and see things...I don't want to be managed. Besides, I've always been able to beat you in anything we ever did together, and I don't see why I couldn't manage you instead.

By the end of the period, woman's image is one of an outwardly rebellious and critical person, as is seen in the following two examples from the 1917 and 1919 issues of the Journal respectively.

"I mean that you will give her what the average man gives his wife--a home, a small portion of his income, a lot of work and anxiety, a little of his time, and if she is lucky, his abiding respect and calm affection."

"There is a difference of the times...a thousand wholly new conditions make it easier for me to work. Is there any difference, when you come down to it, between my working outside the home for money or working inside it as guardian of your money?...Your reasoning is out of date."

So we see an image change for the actual woman in society between 1900 and 1920. Accompanying this is an image change for the female in Ladies Home Journal fiction, 1900-1920. Yet, except for the content of the messages, the female speech patterns do not vary greatly between 1900 and 1920. In other words, the characteristics of female speech in 1900 are, for the most part, the characteristics of female speech in 1920, as Tables 1 -5 indicate.

A linguistic change, therefore, does not accompany the image

change of women in Ladies Home Journal fiction. This seems to indicate that speech is less prone to change than behavior is. It has been suggested that social progress should lead to linguistic progress. The Journal fiction shows evidence of social progress for women but does not show evidence of linguistic progress for women. Might this not indicate that the social progress for women today is not leading to linguistic progress? Despite the fact that women have come a long way since 1900, they might be speaking the same way as they spoke in 1900. Their behavior could be conveying one positive image, while their old-fashioned, demeaning speech patterns could be negating that positive image.

Certainly the influence of language on image is a factor that women and men need to consider. All the social progress is worthless if women's speech makes her seem overly talkative, emotional, non-assertive, uncertain or submissive. More research examining contemporary image and language relationships needs to be done. Women's communication is a new concept, and answers to the many unanswered questions concerning women's communication may provide solutions to some of the problems which still confront women of today.

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